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ABSTRACT

Teachers of culture must know and teach the rationale, the origins of the values and activities, or the problem-solving techniques of the culture being studied. Culture is the totality of the ways in which a group of people solve their basic problems at a given moment in time. As groups of people develop and come in contact with other groups, they share their knowledge and put at each other's disposal their unique ways of solving basic problems. Some of these ways are refused, others adopted or adapted. By studying the way that the problem-solving strategies of a people have evolved, students learn reasons for a culture. For example, to learn about Chicano culture, it is necessary to know and understand three civilizations that contributed to what the Chicano is today: Spanish, Native American, and Mestizo. The obligation to help students understand civilizations that have contributed to a culture is not limited to cross-cultural teaching; it has equal weight in the study of the American culture. (RM)

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"Culture: Responsibility in Teaching"

R.M.E.R.A. '83

by Cecilio Orozco

Abstract

To teach about a culture, or cultures, it is not sufficient to enjoy living within the culture, or cultures. It is not even enough to be able to describe the values and activities or the problem-solving techniques of the culture being observed. Teachers of culture must go beyond being good "role-models", they must know and teach the rationale, the origins of the values and activities or the problem-solving techniques being observed. This obligation is not limited to cross-cultural teaching, it has equal weight when the culture is a common one. All of us, if educated, should know the beauty and the motives for our culture. The study of histories will help, and it is never-ending.

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"Culture: Responsibility in Teaching"

by Cecilio Orozco

Teachers need to be poets and scientists, often, simultaneously. They must describe the sensations activated by their environments by things which are pleasant, exciting, thought provoking, angering, beautiful, etc... This activity may well be likened to that of a poet or painter. The reflections are often superficial. At this level, it is easy to describe one's "culture". These descriptions of culture, by necessity, however, are biased to the way of thinking of the describer and may or may not be understood by the listener. Within one culture these descriptions make sense, everyone agrees that it describes their feelings, views etc... What, then, is needed to cross cultural lines? How can we transmit those sentiments? How can we help others to understand their own feelings and cultural sensations? Teachers need to know the origins of the choices in the culture that is being taught, they are responsible, as the scientists, for the rationale behind the observed.

The responsibility, if one calls his or her activity "culture", is to know how to describe the activity, pointing to the way in which such activity has evolved, its origins and its current direction.

It seems that unless we pursue a definition of "culture" in the present world picture, we will not be able to communicate. Those involved in education, parents who talk of "cultural differences," students in college classes who repeatedly used the word "culture"

in their writings, etc., should have a common, or at least approximate a common meaning for the word. It is interesting to note that as we talk with teachers who are involved in "cultural programs" we find many variations of what "culture" means. In fact, the only thing we seem to find that is common to most people who either teach "culture" or who talk about "culture" is the fact that they agree that they need a good definition for "culture." What is it?

Culture is the totality of the ways in which a group of people solve their basic problems at a given moment in time. It is ever changing. The basic problems of human beings are universal, the way groups learn to solve them make them unique, culturally unique. The basic problems of food, clothing, shelter, mating, communicating, understanding the origin and purpose of man (religion), and the use of leisure time are universal.

As groups of people develop and come in contact with other groups they share their knowledge and put at each other's disposal their unique ways of solving the basic problems. Some of these ways are refused, others adopted or adapted. Cultures change. The study of the evolution of cultures (civilizations) of groups with which one's culture has been in contact will greatly aid in the comprehension of one's culture. Culture can be understood (and perhaps accepted) by looking at the civilizations that have put themselves at the disposal of the particular group which we are viewing. When we study civilizations, when we study the flow of events, when we study the way that the problem-solving strategies of people have evolved, we are in fact studying the <u>reasons</u> for a "culture," the <u>options</u> at the disposal of a group.

In the schools it is easy to determine those civilizations contributing to a particiular "culture." Those civilizatiors can be readily studied to understand the variations (the options chosen) within what we call a "culture." We study these civilizations so we can understand what the people we are observing have had at their disposal. What options have they had? Why do they select "X" choice in a particular situation?

The term "culture" has been used and abused and often interpreted to suit the resources available; often to suit the training of a teacher, but seldom with a sincere academic desire to define it well before attempting to deal with the problem of "cultural pluralism" or "cultural diversity." "The Chicano Culture" of today, for ecample, is not the same as the "Chicano Culture" of fifty years ago or ten years ago. Perhaps it is not even the same as it was yesterday, pointing to the fact that "culture" is and can only be understood at one particular moment in time.

Let us try to define "Chicano Culture" (in the United States of America today) as an exercise in defining "culture." The Chicano of today has at his disposal (in arriving at solutions to his group or personal problems) all the civilizations that have been at the disposal of all the previous "cultures." These "cultures" form the "layers" of the civilizations. The most obvious is that civilization from which Cortés descended. This "Iberian Civilization" includes many values and many changes of values often opposing one another and often complementing one another. In order to understand the civilization that Cortés and those who followed from the Iberian Peninsula brought, one must understand that the people that used the Iberian Peninsula before 1518 were all contributors. Their contributions need to be studied to understand the "Spanish" culture of 1518. The Iberian Peninsula saw groups as far back as 15,000 years before Christ.

Later the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Celts, the Celt-Iberian mixture, the Carthagenians, the Romans, the Alans, the Suevians, the Vandals, the Visigoths and, in the year 711, the Moors. All these people had particular ways of dealing with their day-to-day existence and had original ways of solving their problems. The group that finally identified itself as "Spanish" opted and selected from those ways and adopted some of them, so that what becomes the "Spanish Empire" now has originality in its own diversity. They compose the only group that has this combination of ancestral civilizations at its disposal. Cortés and his followers brought this rich ancestral heritage to Mexico and eventually to what now is the Southwestern United States. Until today many of the items and values brought by the Spanish remain with the Chicano. One of the most obvious ones, of course, is the language. Language is an example of items or values at the disposal of a culture. The Spanish people didn't take all of the "Roman language," the Celt language or the Phoenician language nor all the Greek language, they took elements from all. The Roman, of course, contributed most to the spoken "Spanish" of 1518. This "Hispanic" civilization today is at the disposal of the Chicano and, for that matter, at the disposal of anyone else that studies it.

In America, when the Spanish arrived, there was already a civilization that had extended over most of the land; a civilization that seems to have existed in the valleys of the Gila and Colorado rivers in Arizona and Utah, 6,000 years ago and in Chile 14,000 years ago. Calendars more accurate than those made in Asia existed before the coming of Cortes. These people knew how to solve their problems. They also had ingenious ways of solving their food problems (corn, chile, squash, beans). Their shelters and their government were unique. Those very ways of confronting life are at the disposal of the Chicano today.

Another "Civilization" that we must consider, because it is an American reality, is a civilization of Mestizos; the mixture of Spanish and "Indian" which finally explodes and gains political recognition with a well-known war of independence in 1810. This "Mestizo Culture" is the product of two cultures at one point in time. This Mestizo develops differently than the "Native American" and differently than the "Hispanic" yet, it draws from both. It identifies with one, sometimes the other and sometimes with both. It is unique.

We have drawn three "civilization lines" with their roots lying somewhere in the far distant past: the Spanish, the "Native American," and the Mestizo. The Chicano, however, does not live within any of those civilizations, he lives within the physical, the geographical borders of a new country, energetic and unique in every respect. Just like the Spaniards brought with them a mixture of civilizations so did the Anglo-Saxons and other Western European groups. These groups bring their contributions to form the "American (USA) Civilization" and this new "civilization" now reaches us and it is also at the disposal of what we are trying to identify as "Chicano Culture."

For us to understand why the Chicano is what he is, why he must be what he is, is very difficult because we have to know and understand the civilizations that are at his disposal.

"Culture" probably cannot be taught but we can teach the civilizations contributing to a culture. These civilizations must be presented with emphasis on the contributions which are most outstanding in the "culture" to be observed. The give-and-take of man will only take place when the civilizations contributing to a culture are understood by those of a different culture and who have learned from different civilizations.

Once the USA understands all those civilizations which we all have at our disposal and has looked into their great contributions it will be able to partake from the dream that is America: Not a melting pot of ideas, but a pot of resources from which all of us can draw without being criticized as to choices. Spanish and English languages are resources in that "pot."

The amount of work involved is enormous, almost overwhelming, unless we think in terms of dividing the labor amongst those with whom young Americans come in contact with in school. Each of us shares in the responsibility of knowing <u>why</u> people are alike or different and the end of <u>that</u> study is the tomb itself.

CHICANO CULTURE BREAKDOWN